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# The Negro in Ancient Greece

Frank M. Snowden

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# Survey Courses in the Humanities and World Literature

*A Challenge to Teachers  
of Latin and Greek*

by Frank M. Snowden

AT A recent meeting of a classical society, a speaker declared that teachers of the classics in translation are among the greatest enemies of the classics. The preface to a recent anthology of Latin literature in translation begins:

... we blush to think what some of our learned colleagues in the Classics may say when they find here no Latin text, no scholarly emendations, not even a reference to the profound works of the Germans on *Altertumswissenschaft*, but only a weakened brew, served up for those whose heads are not strong enough to stand the original.<sup>1</sup>

Both the declaration of the speaker at the meeting and the apologetic preface of the anthology represent two typical attitudes of classicists toward the classics in translation. Although only a person insensitive to literary values could accept with complacency the classics in translation, a re-examination of the classics in translation is essential in the light of recent educational trends.

In a work on the humanities, Shoemaker<sup>2</sup> writes:

Between 1928 and 1942 fifty-seven colleges have instituted courses or programs in which, in varying designs and combinations, literature, music, art, philosophy, and history have been brought together as "separate condensed surveys" or more inclusive Humanities programs.

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[Ed. Note: For earlier discussion of this problem in THE CLASSICAL JOURNAL, see William Hardy Alexander, "Adaptive Translations of the Classics," 38 (March, 1943) 337-346; Henry C. Montgomery, "Remarks on 'Adaptive Translations of the Classics,'" and B. Phyllis Armitage, "Adaptive Translations—Have They any Literary Merit?" 39 (October, 1943) 25-29.

The author of this article is a member of the Department of Classics at Howard University, Washington, D. C.

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These courses do not include the approximately one hundred and fifty additional courses concerned solely with world literature. In other words, many colleges are currently offering programs in which one or more courses are devoted to a study of the humanities. The classics, both ancient and modern—read in translation—constitute a substantial part of the programs. The proponents of these courses have faced the facts. Generations of students had been graduating from college with little or no knowledge of our Western literary heritage. Courses had been offered only for the relatively few students possessing a knowledge of the original tongues. To meet the needs of a larger group of students unacquainted with the languages in which the great books were written, survey courses in the humanities and world literature were developed.

Survey courses, whether we approve them or not, will not soon disappear from the curriculum; in some, perhaps many, cases, they will be retained permanently. The introduction of the survey courses does not mean that a study of the original is to be discontinued. On the contrary, the effect may be the opposite; a renewal of interest in the original may be expected, inasmuch as the survey courses in recent years have been presenting the classics, although in translation, to a relatively large group of students. Teachers of the survey courses are not unaware of the importance of a study of the classics in the original. Nor do they overlook the loss both in form and content inherent in translations. However, even the most ardent champions of the humanities, for the present at least, are not very sanguine about the number of stu-

dents who will be able to read with facility more than one foreign language. In this connection, the report of Committee One at the Second Annual Conference held by the Stanford School of the Humanities is significant. The Committee's statement<sup>3</sup> on the classical and modern languages should be cited in its entirety:

When we turn to the classical languages, formerly the basis of a liberal education, we face a different problem. The committee agrees in insisting upon the great importance of the ancient languages as effective implements in a liberal education. It is evident, however, that as a tool subject Greek has practically ceased to exist in our educational system. Whatever its claims, its restoration is impossible unless conditions change. The situation of Latin is only slightly less desperate. Students do not ordinarily acquire a reading knowledge of Latin. An ancient language requirement probably could not be established or maintained today. Nevertheless the present curriculum in Latin and Greek which presents art, history, oratory, and philosophy, as well as the more familiarly recognized aspects of literature, represents the best synthesis of humanistic endeavor yet achieved, and this itself justifies its retention and encouragement, even for a small body of students.

We take it that there is no dispute concerning the value of a reading knowledge of at least one modern language as a tool subject.

Since students are not in great numbers going to study more than one or two of the languages in which the great books are written, the classicist, as well as the teacher of modern languages, has a responsibility to a much larger group of university students than those who elect ancient or modern literature as a field of concentration. The classicist can and should play an important part in the survey courses required of all students in certain colleges. In some instances, the instructors of the survey courses are already drawn from several departments, including the department of classics; in others, the courses are taught by a single individual. In the latter case, although the individuals in charge of the courses are often well-informed and conscientious in their preparation, other departments, including the department of classics, could no doubt improve the course by committing themselves to the inter-departmental idea.

Classics in translation, when well taught, have stimulated the interest of students. As

the survey courses develop, it will be found that more and more students will desire to continue their study of the classics, some even in the original. The classicist should be prepared to meet the renewed interest in the great books of Greece and Rome which the student, in many cases, will read for the first time in the survey courses. For work in the original, the classicist is prepared. However, the time has come for the classicist to enlarge the program for students who wish classical instruction under the guidance of enthusiastic teachers but who have neither the time nor the inclination to learn the original. Survey courses in Greek and Roman literature in translation are already offered in certain colleges.<sup>4</sup> In addition to general courses of this type, other courses should be developed which should consider the students whose interest in the classics has been aroused even by the snippets read in the survey courses. Courses in translation such as the following should be considered: the Greek Drama, the Roman Drama, the Greek Historians, the Roman Historians, the Ancient Epic, Greek Philosophy, Roman Philosophy, etc.

Granted, of course, that such courses are inadequate substitutes for the original and that much which is precious is lost in translation, it must be admitted that courses of this type would be of great value, let us say, to a major in English, Romance languages, or history. The students would acquire a grasp of the "ideas" of the original, even if much of the "form" had to be sacrificed in translation. This is in substance the view of Mark Van Doren:<sup>5</sup>

The great books of the West are in several languages, and the flawless situation would be one in which the student read them as Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, German, or Russian originals. Such a situation will never be; translations are necessary. But the necessity is not lamentable. The better a book the more meaning it keeps in translation; its value was not in its phrases. Style is wonderful, but sense and wisdom are more so.

At any rate, unless the classicist meets the challenge of present educational trends and offers stimulating courses of the type suggested, he will soon discover that other departments, because of the urgent need for the

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introduction of such a program, will perform a task for which the classicist is much better prepared.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> K. Guinagh and A. P. Dorjahn: *Latin Literature in Translation* (New York, Longmans, Green and Company 1942) v.

<sup>2</sup> F. Shoemaker, *Aesthetic Experience and the Humani-*

*ties* (New York, Columbia University Press 1943) 155.

<sup>3</sup> *The Humanities Chart Their Course: Report of the Second Annual Conference Held by the Stanford School of Humanities* (Stanford University, California, Stanford University Press 1944) 47.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. L. Caskey, "The Classics in Translation and the Liberal Arts," *THE CLASSICAL JOURNAL* 36 (1940) 92-100.

<sup>5</sup> M. V. Doren, *Liberal Education* (New York, Henry Holt and Co 1943) 153-54.